
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	1331 Constitution Avenue, NE	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	March 28, 2013	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	13-186	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Amanda Molson	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Owner and developer Ditto Residential, with plans prepared by McGraw Bagnoli Architects, PLLC, requests concept approval for rear and rooftop additions to 1331 Constitution Avenue, NE in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description

During the first half of the twentieth century, a commercial corridor of one-story buildings developed between 1319 and 1337 Constitution Avenue, NE. Domenic Del Vecchio, the founder of what would become the Peoples Hardware Store, constructed 1319, 1321, 1323, 1325, and 1329 between 1909 and 1912. In 1911, owner Catherine Geddes constructed 1327. In 1922, owner Lodovico Trapani constructed 1331. 1333 and 1335 were built by owner Joseph Singe in 1925 and 1926. The construction date of 1337 is unknown, but it appears on a 1928 Sanborn map.

Between the 1930s and 1950s, substantial changes occurred to what was once a cohesive commercial row of one-story buildings. 1321, 1325, 1327, and 1329 received second stories, all within the period of significance for the Capitol Hill Historic District. It appears that 1333 and 1335 were replaced or substantially modified in the 1950s. By the time of the 1959 Sanborn map, 1337 had been demolished and replaced with a parking lot.

Further changes along the row have continued over the past decade. The Board approved demolition of 1333 and 1335 in 2004 (on the basis of their non-contributing status due to age), with those lots and the former parking lot at 1337 now occupied by a three-story multi-unit building. In 2005, the Board approved demolition of 1319 due to its deteriorated state and the resulting loss of integrity; it was replaced with the three-story apartment building as well. In 2012, the Board approved the addition of a second story to 1323, with setback third stories added to both 1323 and 1321 (these projects are currently under construction).

The result of these changes is that 1331 Constitution, the subject property in this case, is the last remaining one-story building on what was once a row of ten, one-story commercial buildings.

Proposal

The owner/developer in this case, Ditto Residential, is also the developer for the Board-approved project underway at 1321-1323 Construction. In this case, a second story would be added to the one-story building at 1331, matching the height, materials, and fenestration of the Board-approved second story at 1323. A third floor, set back sufficiently to render it not visible from Constitution Avenue, would extend the width of the building. A rear addition, clad in wood siding, would continue the rooftop addition and the rear plane of the first and second floors, extending a three-story mass into the backyard. A projecting oriel bay of about 2' deep is proposed for the rear elevation of the second and third floors.

Evaluation

The most challenging aspect of this project in terms of appropriate preservation practices is the proposal to add a second story to a one-story building. The Board has been fairly conservative in reviewing requests to increase the height of one-story commercial buildings, understanding that this change in massing significantly alters what is arguably the most character-defining feature of these otherwise understated buildings.

Capitol Hill has several remaining groupings of one-story buildings, many of which maintain their historic “feeling,” “setting,” and “design” in use, massing, architectural detailing, or all of these elements.¹ Examples include 713-723 F Street, NE (constructed as a group in 1921) and 208-212 2nd Street, SE (constructed as a group in 1911). Barracks Row also includes several groups of one-story buildings (i.e. 517-521 8th Street, SE, constructed in 1924), along with individually constructed one-story buildings that retain their historic “feeling,” “setting,” and “design” as part of a commercial corridor. Just outside the historic district boundaries and only a block from 1331 Constitution, a row of quite early one-story buildings can be found at 1339-1353 C Street, NE.

In contrast to those examples, the 1300 block of Constitution Avenue, NE has already seen significant changes in massing to its one-story buildings, changes that began as long ago as the 1930s and which have continued through 2012. In addition to the second stories that have been added to 1321, 1323, 1325, 1327, and 1329, much taller apartment buildings have since replaced 1319 and 1333/1335/1337. Further, the ground floors of the former commercial buildings have experienced substantial alterations, and a number of the buildings have moved to residential use.

Whether these changes would be appropriate today or not, there is clearly an established pattern of change on this block that has allowed these particular buildings to grow and evolve. As a result, the historic context is considerably fractured as compared to the streetscape that existed in the late 1920s, and the subject properties have suffered some loss of historic integrity. The condition of 1323 was poorer than the condition of 1331. However, the diminished historic context applies to the entire row, and the reasonably good condition of 1331 does not surmount

¹ The National Register traditionally recognizes a property's integrity through seven aspects, with “feeling” described as, “the quality that a historic property has in evoking the aesthetic or historic sense of a past period of time. Although it is itself intangible, feeling is dependent upon the aid's significant physical characteristics that convey its historic qualities.” The quality of “setting” is defined as, “the physical environment of a historic property that illustrates the character of the place. Integrity of setting remains when the surroundings of an aid to navigation have not been subjected to radical change.” The quality of “design” is defined as, “the composition of elements that constitute the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property.”

the significant changes in feeling and setting that have occurred along the row. This isolated situation argues for some flexibility, and approval of this project would not serve as a precedent-setting case that would necessarily apply to Capitol Hill's other one-story buildings.

One approach might be to design the new second story on 1331 in a more contemporary vocabulary that calls out its arrival as a wholly new element. However, the more appropriate solution in this case, considering the relatively simple nature of this row both in the design of the original one-story buildings and in the second floors that were added over time, is to utilize a streamlined design that settles calmly into the streetscape. The height of the second story will mimic that of 1321 and 1323. Though this is a few feet shorter than the height of the two buildings at 1325 and 1327, this seems like the right proportion given the more diminutive storefront at 1331. Keeping the height of the second floor low also enables the third story to rise just a few feet above the rear elevation of 1329, rather than a full floor.

Constructing a mockup of a third story on the one-story building at 1331 was not possible, as no second story yet exists to support it. As a result, the applicants have prepared perspective renderings. They have also committed to working with the HPO as final drawings are prepared and as construction gets underway in order to ensure that the rooftop additions are not visible from Constitution Avenue (a commitment that was made and commendably upheld for 1321-1323 as well). Fortunately, the generous depth of the building affords the opportunity to push the additions back somewhat further, if needed, and a proposed parapet wall on the front elevation will help to screen views from the street.

As compared to the rather deep rear additions at 1321-1321 Constitution, the new rear addition at 1331 extends a somewhat more modest 18' from the existing rear wall. The addition will extend approximately 8' beyond the three-story apartment building to the left (east) and approximately 5' beyond the two-story building to the right (west). The result will be an overall building footprint of 59' deep, as opposed to the 69' approved by the Board at 1321-1323. North Carolina Avenue cuts across the square at an angle, thereby decreasing the depth of lots as they extend towards the east end of the square. As a result, holding the depth of the addition back helps to maintain breathing room between the addition's back wall and the rear elevations and backyards of properties across the alley.

On the front elevation, the applicants have committed to work with HPO to closely replicate the original storefront as part of the renovation. Research is currently being conducted to determine whether this building had a projecting bay (as a number on the row did originally) or whether it featured a flush storefront window. Using available historic data, details of the storefront will be worked out with HPO as the construction drawings are prepared.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff, with the condition that the applicants work with HPO to finalize storefront details. However, this should not be construed as approval for any necessary zoning relief.